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Différences culturelles et styles de direction

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Résumé de l'article

Il peut bien arriver qu'un cadre (ou un officier de compagnie) muté dans un milieu culturel différent se dise que « les gens sont les mêmes partout » et que « les techniques de direction développées dans son propre milieu sont applicables sans grandes modifications dans un autre milieu culturel ».

Cette minimisation des différences culturelles nous semble encore plus caractérisée en Amérique du Nord où l'on peut oublier trop facilement l'existence d'au moins trois milieux culturels différents : les Etats-Unis, le Canada anglais et le Canada français.

Comme les anthropologues culturels tendent à concentrer leurs analyses sur des situations sociales plutôt qu'industrielles, les résultats de leurs recherches nous semblent tout simplement inadéquats pour la compréhension de l'influence des variables culturelles dans une situation industrielle très souvent caractérisée par des structures de pouvoir imposées de l'extérieur.

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Cultural Differences and Supervisory Styles

Arthur Elliott Carlisle

Assuming that managerial techniques developed through experience in the domestic situation and through a synthesis of the research and writings of accepted writers in the field of management are too often taken by executives for immediate installation and ready acceptance by supervision in a different cultural setting, Mr. Carlisle decided, in 1966, to conduct a study to explore in three cultural settings the perceptions of managers of the approach used by their lower level supervisors in directing the work of employees. This paper is a presentation of this study and its findings.

An executive who is transferred to operations in another cultural setting brings with him definite ideas on how employees should be supervised. Part of any manager's view of the « best » way to supervise is a function of his own personality — a domineering individual tends to favor an autocratic approach — and a part of it is a function of his own experience both of the practical on-the-job variety and of the more formal learning processes. In any event, the exported American's first reaction to a change in cultural setting may well be that, while customs will no doubt be different, « people are the same everywhere » and methods of working with them will be just as appropriate as they were at home. This feeling of sameness is particularly prevalent when transfers are between the United States and Canada, but even in these cases (and especially where the Province of Quebec is involved) the effect of cultural differences on organizational behavior should not be ignored.

The significance of cultural differences to the manager involved in operations in a foreign setting is that it may not be reasonable for

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him to expect that managerial techniques developed through experience in the domestic situation and through a synthesis of the research and writings of accepted writers in the field of management will be appropriate for immediate installation and ready acceptance by supervision in a different cultural setting. Neither will it be adequate to lean solely on the findings of cultural anthropologists to make appropriate modifications, for cultural anthropologists tend to concentrate on social rather than industrial situations and the latter have the additional vital dimension of externally-imposed power structures, structures divorced completely from individuals' innate desires to interact with other individuals in manners that attempt to satisfy felt needs. But the power structure has even further effects resulting from the fact that the cultural backgrounds of upper-level managers is often that of the owners of the enterprise, or at least different from that of the workers. The significance of all this is that, in order to understand the influence of cultural variables in the industrial situation, it is necessary to analyze specific industrial situations — it is simply inadequate to try and apply the message of the cultural anthropologist to a performed synthesis of managerial thought and experience.

It was with this idea in mind that an attempt was made to explore in three cultural settings the perceptions of managers of the approach used by their lower level supervisors in directing the work of employees. Executives working in the same corporation and at approximately the same organizational level, but in three cultural settings (American, English Canadian and French Canadian) were asked questions as to the ways in foremen direct subordinates. While the sample of managers was not large, it is at least an indication when striking differences in perceptions of and expectations as to subordinates' behavior are encountered, that there are probably real differences at the root of the responses.

In the course of the study completed in 1966, appropriate questions were asked of 27 executives in the three locations. Questions were asked in as non-directive a manner as possible and were open-ended with no indication given by the interviewer as to whether any one response was any more correct or desirable than any other. While this approach results in answers (sometimes no response, sometimes several) that are frequently not mutually exclusive, it gives a truer picture of the interviewees' views than would be obtained by having the interviewer suggest possible responses and thereby force the respondent to fit his own

views into some conceptual scheme established arbitrarily by the researcher.

If it is true that, as one English Canadian manager put it: « With the French Canadian supervisor and the French Canadian worker you get obedience and not co-operation and as a result of this, management has less ability to get things across to the worker and to get him to co-operate », then the executive who advocates a participative approach to management should be prepared to undertake an extensive program designed to change attitudes of both supervisory and non-supervisory personnel in French Canadian plants.

Differences in Approaches to Supervision of American, English Canadian and French Canadian Foremen as Perceived by their Superiors

Factory managers with experience in any two of the three cultures being studied were asked for their views as to differences in approach to the supervisor's job by American, English Canadian and French Canadian foremen. The majority of comparisons were made between English and French Canadians because most of the managers with experience in two or more cultural settings had worked in English and French Canada.

TABLE 1

RESPONSES OF FACTORY MANAGERS TO INTERVIEW QUESTION A. « DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY DIFFERENCES IN THE USUAL STYLES OF SUPERVISION OF ENGLISH CANADIAN AND FRENCH CANADIAN FOREMEN ? » AND B. « WOULD ONE GROUP BE ANY MORE LIKELY TO DISCUSS WORK-RELATED DECISIONS WITH SUBORDINATES THAN WOULD THE OTHER ? »

Response		*19 Managers Experiences in Both Cultural Settings*
A)	French Canadians tend to be more autocratic	7
	No difference	4
	English Canadians more objective	3
	English Canadians more regimented	2
	English Canadians have a greater sense of urgency	1
	English Canadians tend to overlook rules	1
B)	English Canadians more likely to discuss work-related decisions	11
	French Canadians more likely to discuss work-related decisions	4
	No difference noted	4

Seven of the nineteen managers who made the comparison noted a tendency for French Canadian supervisors to be more autocratic. Three others indicated that English Canadians tend to be more « objective » and two that they are « regimented ». Commenting on the « autocratic tendency » of his compatriots at the foreman level, one French Canadian executive offered this explanation: « In French Canada for a French Canadian to attain supervisory status is still a relatively rare achievement and it has status value for the individual. And one way to reap the benefits of status is to affirm his authority over his subordinates ». Another said simply that French Canadian supervisors are more « insecure ».

Eleven of fifteen respondents noted that English Canadians are more likely to discuss work-related decisions with their men than are French Canadians and this observation is consistent with the idea that the latter adopt a more autocratic approach to their subordinates. Contrasting the two approaches to discussion prior to making decisions, one manager observed: « The English Canadian supervisor tends to discuss things to arrive at a decision, while the French Canadian does so to give information ».

The situation in French Canada is probably not too different from that encountered in many foreign countries where U.S. managers are responsible for industrial operations. The educational level of the natives is not as high as that found at home, and the language of the workers is different from that of the executives. At the start of operations in a foreign setting some natives have to be hired to direct the work force in a manner consistent with the desires of the directors of the enterprise and co-operative, affable natives of above average ability who have learned the language of the owners are selected for jobs at the lower levels of supervision. In time, as the educational levels of the natives rises (partly as a result of the industrialization of their society), they gradually assume positions of greater authority within the managerial hierarchy. While this gradual process of encroachment is taking place, however, the encroachers may have the feeling that they are in positions of authority only at the pleasure and because of the charity of the managing group. This can result in an overwhelming desire to please their superiors, tending to make them reluctant to take any additional risks involving bad decisions that might result from sharing the decision-making process with their subordinates.

There is another dimension to the problem as well. Native supervisors who rise to positions of authority in an organization may be

viewed with a certain amount of distrust by their non-supervisory compatriots and may even be openly resented as individuals who have compromised with the foreign industrial imperialists in exchange for an improved economic state. This is particularly true during periods when nationalism is a factor in the political scene and the very existence of foreign ownership of the means of production is an irritant to natives of the host country. These feelings of antagonism between supervisors and subordinates may be strong enough to render a participative approach to management ineffectual.

Thus, if the management of a company operating in a foreign cultural setting is anxious to have its native supervisors adopt a more participative approach with their subordinates, extra training efforts will be required to overcome any predisposition on their part to be autocratic. At the same time the expectations of subordinates as to supervisory behavior will have to be modified so that when a foreman expresses interest in his workers' views they will respond with interest rather than incredulity.

There was less pattern to the response of managers who made the comparisons between American and English Canadian foremen. A summary of responses is given in Table 2.

TABLE 2

RESPONSES OF FACTORY MANAGERS TO INTERVIEW QUESTION A. « DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY DIFFERENCES IN THE USUAL STYLES OF SUPERVISION OF ENGLISH CANADIAN AND AMERICAN FOREMEN ? » AND B. « WOULD ONE GROUP BE ANY MORE LIKELY TO DISCUSS WORK-RELATED DECISIONS WITH SUBORDINATES THAN THE OTHER ? »

Responses	*10 Managers Experienced in Both Cultural Settings*
A) American a lot tougher on his people than English Canadian	3
Superior/Subordinate relationship very marked in Canada	2
No Difference	2
Canadians more autocratic	1
Not the same sense of urgency with English Canadian	1
B) English Canadian less likely to discuss work-related decisions	3
English Canadian more likely to discuss work-related decisions	2

The sample size was too small and the responses too varied to point to any marked difference in approach between American and English Canadian supervisors. The interviews themselves, however, left the impression that, as one American manager put it: « There is a tendency for English Canadian supervisors to follow some of the labor practices in their relations with their subordinates that are common in Great Britain. It is more class-oriented than the United States. Perhaps there is a little more interest in status here in English Canada than there would be in the U.S.... The implication of all this is that management has to keep constantly alert to make sure that all of its managers are carrying out their jobs in the way that the company wants them to ».

Differences in Amounts of Discussion of Work Related Decisions Desired

Although no definite pattern of responses resulted from answers to questions designed to explore this area, several interesting side observations were made by executives with experience in English and French Canada and the United States.

Two managers commented that the lower level of education among French Canadian workers limits the usefulness of such discussion. As an English Canadian expressed it, « Given people of equal educational background, I'd say that there would be no difference in the amounts of discussion English and French Canadians and Americans would want in regard to work-related decisions. But in ———————— (location of operation in the Province of Quebec), I'd say there is a difference. The average level of education here is far lower than that of the other communities in which we operate in the United States and Canada. I think the French Canadian would probably prefer the courtesy of having his ideas asked for when work-related decisions are being made, but it would be a waste of time ». Another manager commented, « The French Canadian is suspicious when you ask for his ideas in the decision-making process ».

Perhaps the French Canadian workers' suspicion about participation in the decision making process partly results from the fact that managers cannot change their supervisory styles overnight without confusing subordinates. In addition, French Canadians have been confined, for the most part, to lower levels in foreign-owned operations and when their managers suddenly get the « participative message » and are anxious to consult with them, they are simply not prepared for this role.

Here again is evidence that, before a participative approach can be effectively used in managing foreign workers, some ground work is required before supervisors and subordinates can function effectively in the changed relationships required of them.

Worker/Manager Relationships

Managers were asked whether they could perceive any differences in the worker/manager relationships in the three cultural settings. Ten of eleven managers who spoke of the relationship in Quebec said that the French Canadian shows more deference to his superior than the English Canadian or American. « The French Canadian is inclined to hold his manager in awe and is more conscious of his power », said one manager. This perception of the worker/manager relationship was echoed by all but two respondents making the comparison and seems completely consistent with responses to other questions aimed at describing managers' perceptions of how French Canadian supervisors perform their jobs. Whether this tendency to « put their managers on a pedestal », as one respondent put it, is a result of cultural respect for authority or not is debatable, but the important thing for managers to recognize is that it is very real according to executives interviewed in this study. Supervisor/subordinate relationships are qualitatively different in Quebec from those in the United States, or even in English Canada, they are more status-charged and formal and result in different expectations on the part of both supervisor and subordinate as to appropriate behavior, a factor that should be recognized by the foreign executive anxious to « update » the autocratic approach of his native supervisors and replace it with a more participative one.

Conclusion

It may be argued that because United States management techniques are the most efficient in the world they should be exported to the foreign countries in which United States companies have established branches, subsidiaries or affiliates; however, foreign cultures may not be ready to receive them in unmodified form. In many cases, in order for them to be at all effective, preparatory spadework must be done. Experienced managers have long recognized that organizations and individuals usually resist change and are prepared to encounter complaints, dire predictions and even threats prior to the introduction of fundamental changes into

a business organization. Overcoming perfectly natural resistance to change sorely taxes the time and patience of the manager who is anxious to start reaping the benefits of new methods or approaches. The same situation occurs in regard to managerial style, but the change to a more participative form of management may be more disrupting in foreign cultural settings than is the case in the United States with its democratic traditions.

It's all very well to talk about the necessity of training natives to accept current breakthroughs in managerial thought and philosophy (if needed they are breakthroughs and not fads), but it is vital to the success of such a project that managers recognize that workers' expectations as to appropriate managerial behavior may take longer to change in foreign settings than they do in the domestic situation. We may think of other cultures as quaint and interesting or even behind the times, but if we do, we are forgetting that they represent an anthropological accomodation between sociological and economic forces on the one hand and individual psychological needs on the other. Perhaps, largely due to the behavior of foreign managers, workers with a different cultural background may have come to expect, though they may resent, an autocratic approach on the part of their superiors, and these expectations will have to be modified by a management interested in introducing a more participative approach to the job of supervision in foreign operations.

DIFFERENCES CULTURELLES ET STYLES DE DIRECTION

INTRODUCTION

Il peut bien arriver qu'un cadre (ou un officier de compagnie) muté dans un milieu culturel différent se dise que « les gens sont les mêmes partout » et que « les techniques de direction développées dans son propre milieu sont applicables sans grandes modifications dans un autre milieu culturel ».

Cette minimisation des différences culturelles nous semble encore plus caractérisée en Amérique du Nord où l'on peut oublier trop facilement l'existence d'au moins trois milieux culturels différents : les Etats-Unis, le Canada anglais et le Canada français.

Comme les anthropologues culturels tendent à concentrer leurs analyses sur des situations sociales plutôt qu'industrielles, les résultats de leurs recherches nous semblent tout simplement inadéquats pour la compréhension de l'influence des variables culturelles dans une situation industrielle très souvent caractérisée par des structures de pouvoir imposées de l'extérieur.

ETUDE DE 1966

C'est en partant de cette hypothèse qu'une étude, conduite en 1966, a voulu explorer les perceptions qu'ont des cadres d'une compagnie de l'approche utilisée par leurs contremaîtres pour diriger le travail des employés. Les cadres, au nombre de 27 avaient les caractéristiques suivantes : ils appartenaient à la même organisation, se situaient à peu près à un même niveau de responsabilité et plusieurs d'entre eux étaient entrés en contact avec au moins deux des trois milieux culturels différents.

La méthode utilisée se voulant aussi peu directive que possible, les réponses des personnes interviewées permettaient une perception que nous croyons assez représentative de la situation. Les questions posées permettaient d'investiguer, entre autres, les différences (telles que perçues par leurs supérieurs) dans la façon pour les contremaîtres de concevoir leur rôle et les différences perceptibles dans les relations employés-gérance.

QUELQUES RÉSULTATS

Parmi les dix-neuf personnes à faire une comparaison entre le Canada anglais et le Canada français, sept notèrent une tendance chez les contremaîtres canadiens-français à être plus autocratiques que leurs collègues canadiens-anglais. Onze personnes sur quinze trouvèrent que les canadiens-anglais ont plus tendance à discuter les décisions rattachées au travail que ne le sont leurs collègues canadiens-français. On peut noter ici une corrélation entre la première et la deuxième observation.

Commentant la « tendance autocratique » de ses compatriotes au niveau des contremaîtres, un cadre canadien-français offrit comme explication qu'au Canada français le statut rattaché au poste de contremaître serait relativement élevé et que cette valeur relative inciterait le contremaître canadien-français à affirmer son autorité sur ses subordonnés.

Sur la question des différences perceptibles dans les relations employés-gérance, dix personnes sur onze notèrent que les Canadiens français montrent plus de déférence envers un supérieur que ne le font les Canadiens anglais ou les Américains. Les Canadiens français auraient tendance à craindre leurs supérieurs et à avoir conscience de leurs pouvoirs. Que cette tendance soit ou non un résultat d'un respect culturel pour l'autorité est une question discutable, l'important pour les cadres est que ce phénomène est très réel (toujours, selon les personnes interviewées).

CONCLUSION

Il est facile de considérer les autres cultures comme bizarres ou intéressantes et il est aussi facile d'oublier qu'elles représentent une accommodation anthropologique entre d'une part, les forces sociologiques et économiques et, d'autre part, les besoins psychologiques individuels. Si des travailleurs d'un milieu culturel différent en sont venus à attendre une approche autocratique de la part de leurs supérieurs, c'est peut-être dû, en grande partie, au comportement des cadres étrangers. Une gérance intéressée à amener plus de participation de la part de ses employés, devra travailler à transformer ces attentes.